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ABSTRACT

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) makes it possible to build human capital resources by providing employment services and training to youth and adult dislocated workers. Such services are particularly needed in the rural South, where those affected by welfare reform have few job skills or educational credentials. WIA calls for the creation of state workforce investment boards appointed by the state governor. The governor and the workforce investment board then designate local workforce investment areas and create local workforce investment boards to develop a workforce preparation and employment system that meets the unique needs of their areas. Each local board must assemble a youth council charged with developing a comprehensive plan to address the education and workforce preparation needs of low-income youth. Local boards are also responsible for selecting One-Stop System operators and providers of youth activities. Youth targeted are 14-21 years old, low-income, and experiencing at least one challenge such as being a school dropout, pregnant, an offender, or disabled. The One-Stop Delivery system is available to adults and dislocated workers, and provides three levels of services: core, intensive, and training. Priority attention must be given to public assistance participants and low-income individuals. Possible roles for land grant universities, and their extension services in particular, are in labor market information and assessments, local workforce investment board training, support for One-Stop Centers, delivery of educational services for dislocated and at-risk populations, assisting the youth councils through the 4-H programs, youth leadership development, performance accountability, and economic development opportunities. (TD)

SOUTHERN RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER
SRDC

Information *Brief*

A Special Series on Welfare Reform in the South

ED 433 164

Improving job opportunities for low-income people: The hope of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998

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Introduction

Recent studies offer convincing evidence that welfare caseloads have dipped dramatically in the United States. In fact, a recent SRDC *Information Brief* prepared by Julie Zimmerman [7], offers evidence that the South has led the way in terms of the magnitude of declines over the course of the last five years. While many believe that such reductions are demonstrative of the success of welfare reform, others argue that such data simply mask some of the serious problems facing current and recent welfare recipients as they enter the world of work. Recent findings [2, 3, 4] reveal that:

- Nationally, nearly 50 percent of parents who have left welfare since the implementation of welfare reform in August 1996 appear not to have any documented job.
- Welfare recipients who have been successful in securing employment are being paid wages that keep them embedded in poverty.

Educational level and work-related experiences are critical factors that give shape to the quality of jobs that TANF recipients are able to secure and the wages they are able to earn [2].

- Many jobs captured by welfare recipients offer few opportunities for movement up the career ladder.
- Very few individuals who have transitioned from welfare-to-work receive any job-related benefits, e.g. paid vacation, sick leave, or health insurance coverage.

While these findings point to the difficulties that await welfare recipients as they move from welfare-to-work, one point is quite clear; educational level and work-related experiences are critical factors that give shape to the quality of jobs that TANF recipients are able to secure and the wages they are able

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to earn [2]. Unfortunately, the educational credentials of welfare recipients show that most have less than a high school education and few have work-related experiences. A case in point is the rural South. Among welfare recipients in the rural areas of this region, more than 50 percent have less than a high school education [1].

These very barriers to qualifying for decent employment have caused some to argue that the "*work first*" philosophy of welfare reform places severe hardships on a host of TANF participants who lack the human resource attributes to become economically self-sufficient. They suggest that building the educational credentials and job skills of TANF recipients must be undertaken prior to, or in concert with, efforts to place them in jobs. Indeed, few would discount the importance of further building the human capital resources of TANF recipients, but the simple truth is that welfare reform was never designed to place priority attention on this matter.

Now, however, federal legislation makes it possible to build human capital resources by providing training to youth and adult dislocated workers. In fact, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), passed into law in August 1998, constitutes one of the most comprehensive workforce improvement programs ever signed into law. And, low-income adults and youth are key audiences targeted by this legislation [5, 6].

Building a Comprehensive Workforce Training Program

In many respects, WIA is intended to mobilize states and localities to utilize their creative energies in designing and implementing programs that best meet the needs of current workers, potential employees, and local employers. As noted earlier, it is important to welfare reform because it seeks to meet the employment needs of individuals receiving public assistance (such as TANF or Food Stamps beneficiaries). And a key dimension of WIA is strengthening the knowledge and skills of public assistance recipients in hopes that they can more effectively compete for decent paying jobs.

> In many respects, the WIA represents an overt effort to marshal the resources needed to help youth progress educationally and to secure those skills that will facilitate a successful transition into the world of work as they reach adulthood.

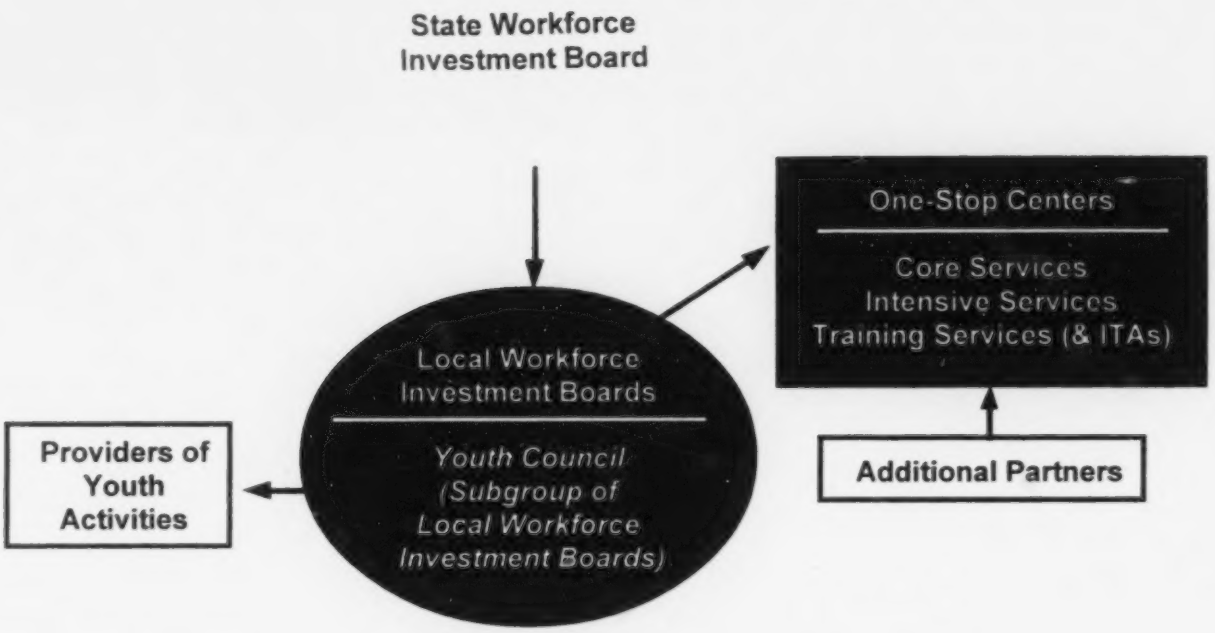
This *Information Brief* offers an overview of the key provisions of the 1998 Workforce Investment Act. In doing so, it addresses the key elements that constitute the major fabric of the nation's new job training system. Also outlined are the various ways in which the South's land-grant university system can be a partner in supporting their respective state's workforce investment activities. While not intended to be comprehensive in its treatment, this report should offer the reader a reasonably good foundation of the major features of the WIA legislation.

The Purpose and Structure of the WIA System

The 1998 Workforce Investment Act is intended to pursue at least four major goals:

- Invest in workforce efforts that serve to increase the employment, retention, and earnings of participants.
- Increase the occupational skill attainment of those who enter the workforce investment system.
- Help improve the quality of the workforce and as such, enhance the productivity and competitiveness of America's workforce.
- Reduce dependence on welfare by equipping individuals with the skills they need to effectively move into the workforce.

Figure 1. **Components of the WIA legislation**



The principal audiences being targeted are adults, dislocated workers, and youth.

Figure 1 provides a visual overview of the major components of the WIA legislation. WIA first calls for the creation of state Workforce Investment Boards to be appointed by the state governor. Furthermore, the governor, in concert with the state Workforce Investment Board, is responsible for designating local workforce investment areas within the state. In order to develop a workforce preparation and employment system that truly meets the unique needs of each of the local workforce investment area, local Workforce Investment Boards are being created. Each local board is required to put together a Youth Council as one of its subgroups. That council is charged with the responsibility of helping develop a comprehensive plan to address the education and workforce preparation needs of low-income youth in the area. Local Workforce Investment Boards also are responsible for selecting One-Stop System operators and providers of youth activities. Mobilizing the resources and expertise of partners, who are positioned to broaden the breadth of services offered through the local One-Stop System, is encouraged within each of the local workforce investment areas.

When is WIA slated to begin? All states are required to begin implementation of the WIA system by July 1, 2000. When a state's WIA system is in place, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) will cease to exist. Furthermore, the Private Industry Councils (PICs) will be superseded by the local Workforce Investment Boards. States were allowed the option of beginning the WIA effort July 1, 1999. However, only a small number of states (approximately 13) had the necessary components in place to be designated as early implementors.

Following is a more in-depth treatment of each component of the WIA system outlined in Figure 1.

State Workforce Investment Boards

As noted earlier, the responsibility for establishing the state Workforce Investment Board falls squarely on the shoulders of the state governor. By law, the governor must ensure that the majority of the board's membership (i.e., 51 percent or higher) be comprised of representatives of the state's business community. In fact, the chair of the state board must be drawn from the business sector. Other entities to be represented on the state Workforce Investment Board include chief elected officials of municipal and/or county governments; state legislators from the House and Senate chambers; labor organizations; youth-serving organizations; entities, such as community colleges and community-based organizations, with a history of engagement in workforce investment activities; the lead WIA state agency; state agencies whose mission proves relevant to the efforts of the state board; and others as deemed important by the governor.

The functions of the state Workforce Investment Board are significant. Its responsibilities include:

◆ Assisting the governor in developing a five-year strategic workforce investment plan for the state. This plan details the workforce develop activities to be carried out in compliance with the major requirements of WIA, including how the needs of special populations are to be addressed. The special populations include dislocated workers, low-income adults/youth, persons training for nontraditional jobs, and individuals experiencing multiple barriers to employment.

◆ Monitoring the progress of the state's workforce investment system and exploring strategies for further refining the state's WIA activities.

◆ Designating the local workforce investment areas and reviewing plans submitted by the local workforce investment boards.

Guiding principles of reform from the Workforce Investment Act of 1998

(from at statement by Raymond L. Bramucci, assistant secretary of labor for employment and training, to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Safety, and Training, July 1, 1999)

1. Streamlined services.
2. Empowering individuals.
3. Universal access to services.
4. Increased accountability for state and local communities.
5. A new role for local boards and the private sector.
6. State and local flexibility.
7. Improved youth programs.

◆ Determining the formula for allocating WIA funds to the designated workforce investment areas.

◆ Developing and improving the state's performance measures. This includes documenting how the needs of special populations noted above have been met and the level of satisfaction that participants and employers who are users have had with the workforce investment system.

◆ Offering guidance to the governor on the development of a statewide labor market information system. This information system is of critical importance to the state board because it must incorporate into the state plan the following items:

1. the state's needs with regard to current and projected employment opportunities;
2. the jobs skills that will be required to fully capture these job opportunities;
3. the workforce skills and economic development needs of the state; and

4. the type and availability of workforce investment activities across the state.

◆ Preparing the annual report to be submitted to the U.S. Secretary of Labor.

Local Workforce Investment Areas and Boards

The establishment of local workforce investment areas is largely the purview of the Governor and the state Workforce Investment Board. However, designation of workforce investment areas is not to be undertaken until local elected officials (such as county supervisors/commissioners) and other public entities have been given the opportunity to offer input on the geographic areas to be considered for such designation. Other factors that the Governor is encouraged to consider in the selection process are:

◆ The educational resources available within the local workforce investment areas (such as the presence of community colleges, vocational schools, or other educational entities).

◆ The consistency of investment areas with recognized labor market areas.

Land-grant universities in the South, with their long tradition of investments in applied research and outreach education programs that meet the needs of their citizens, represent important resources that can contribute to the valuable work of the state and local Workforce Investment Boards.

◆ The presence of support services to facilitate the implementation of a diverse set of WIA activities.

◆ The distance that individuals will have to travel to secure needed services.

It is important to note that the WIA legislation does provide a mechanism for the automatic designation of workforce investment areas. For example, local government jurisdictions having a population of half a million or more persons can secure designation as an investment area. Areas that served as a service delivery area under JTPA, or an area that was served by a rural concentrated employment program grant recipient under JTPA, can seek temporary designation as a local workforce investment area. However, these latter entities must capable of documenting that they performed in an effective manner over the past two years under the JTPA initiative and maintained fiscal integrity.

Much like the state board, the local Workforce Investment Board must draw a majority of its membership from the business sector. Of critical importance, however, is that the members must include business representatives who genuinely represent the nature of employment opportunities present in the local workforce investment area. Others members to be tapped include local educational institutions, labor organizations/employee representatives, economic development agencies, community-based organizations, one-stop system partners, local government representatives, and others judged to be relevant to the work of the local board. In most cases, the selection of the local board members is the responsibility of the chief elected officials who operate in the jurisdictions encompassed by the local workforce investment area.

Key responsibilities of the local board. The WIA legislation requires that local boards be engaged in a number of important functions.

Their responsibilities include the following:

◆ Prepare a strategic plan for local workforce investment for subsequent submission to the governor for approval.

◆ Undertake selection of the one-stop operators and providers of youth services.

◆ Identify and approve eligible providers of training and intensive services.

◆ Prepare the budget to support the WIA efforts in the local investment area.

◆ Provide oversight of the work being undertaken in the local investment area.

◆ Help develop the set of performance measures that are to be used to document progress toward meeting local workforce needs.

◆ Contribute to the development of an information system that can serve a vital resource for better understanding the dynamics of labor markets within the local workforce investment area. This system would include:

1. the workforce investment needs of job seekers, current workers, and businesses located in the local investment area;
2. the current and projected employment opportunities in the local area; and
3. the educational credentials and/or job-related skills needed to qualify for these jobs slots.

◆ Seek to engage employers in the hiring of individuals who have sought assistance from the local one-stop services system, particularly users designated as special populations (i.e., dislocated workers, welfare recipients and other low-income adults).

Local Youth Councils

One of the important features of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 is the attention given to the nation's youth, particularly those who find themselves embedded in a host of economic, physical, and social challenges. In many respects, WIA represents an overt effort to marshal the resources needed to help youth progress educationally and secure those skills that will facilitate a successful transition into the world of work as they reach adulthood.

To ensure that youth are accorded sufficient attention in the local investment area, WIA calls for the creation of a Youth Council, a body that serves as a subgroup of the local Workforce Investment Board. Members of the local investment board who have expertise or interest in youth development or youth policy, are generally expected to be appointed to the Youth Council. Others who may be invited to serve on the council include representatives of youth serving organizations (including juvenile justice and law enforcement agencies), local public housing authorities, Job Corps representatives, parents of youth seeking assistance, persons with recognized experience relating to youth activities, and others as deemed appropriate. The local Workforce Investment Board, in consultation with the chief elected officials in the investment area, carries out the responsibility of appointing Youth Council members.

In many respects, the Youth Council serves as the major architect of the local board's strategic plan dealing with youth. In addition, the council is charged with the responsibility of submitting recommendations to the board regarding eligible providers of youth activities in the area, and carrying out oversight of the various activities and services being delivered by providers. The local board has the discretion to assign other responsibilities to the Youth Council as deemed necessary.

Youth eligible for assistance. It is clear that the pursuit of coordinated youth programs and services within the local investment areas is to be targeted principally to youth who are 14-21 years of age and who are of low-income. Moreover, these individual must be experiencing at least one challenge—deficient in basic literacy skills, school dropout, behind in grade level, disabled, pregnant or a parent, homeless, runaway, or foster child, an offender, or in need of additional assistance to complete an educational program or acquire and retain employment. WIA does mandate that a minimum of 30 percent of the

funds devoted to youth initiatives be dedicated to assist local youngsters who are not enrolled in school.

Activities targeted to youth by local providers. The entities selected as providers of youth programs and services are to be engaged in activities that promote educational progress and/or workforce preparation. The WIA legislation explicitly states that the following efforts must be undertaken to support the needs of targeted youth:

- Tutoring, study skills training, and instruction that result in the completion of a high school education. This also includes dropout prevention activities.

- Access to and involvement in alternative high school programs.

- Work experiences, be they paid or unpaid, with area employers. This would include organized internships and job shadowing programs.

- Summer employment opportunities that promote academic and occupation-related learning.

- Occupational skills training that are deemed appropriate.

- Linking of youth with adult mentors for a period of at least one year.

- Comprehensive guidance and counseling activities that assist youth in making informed choices regarding their future academic and/or occupational pursuits.

- Opportunities for leadership development activities, which can be fruitful in helping the individual build self-confidence and develop the capacity to interact and work as a team with others. Community service and peer-centered activities that encourage positive, responsible behavior during non-school hours can also be included.

Establishing a One-Stop Delivery System for Adults

No doubt, the component of the WIA that has generated the greatest interest is the building of a One-Stop Delivery system for adults. Access to such a system is available to adults and dislocated workers falling into the 22-72 age range. Every local workforce investment area must have a physical One-Stop Center located within it. However, such a site can be expanded through the creation of affiliated sites (one that offers users physical, electronic, or technological access to the area's One-Stop Center).

In a nutshell, the One-Stop System is designed to provide three levels of service: core services, intensive services, and training services. While core services are available to any adult 22-72 years of age, certain conditions must be met in order for an individual to gain access to intensive or training services.

Core services. The following services will be made available to any adult meeting the above age requirement.

- Outreach programming activities by One-Stop operators to orient adults and dislocated workers of the information and services available through the One-Stop Center.

- Initial assessment of the skills, aptitudes, and abilities of the One-Stop Center customer.

- Career counseling, job search, and job placement assistance.

- User access to accurate employment statistics on local, regional and national labor markets. This includes job vacancies, skills

needed for these jobs, local occupations in demand, and the wages and skill requirements associated with these local employment slots.

- Information on the availability of local supportive services, such as child care and transportation, and referring individuals to these services.

Intensive services. Unlike core services, intensive services are limited to unemployed adults who are unable to find employment even after tapping the core services offered by the One-Stop Center. However, the one-stop operator must designate such persons as being in need of more in-depth job-related assistance. Individuals who are already employed, but who are in need of intensive services in order to secure or retain jobs offering them economic self-sufficiency, are allowed to gain access to intensive services as well.

Among the intensive services offered are comprehensive and specialized assessments of the skills levels and service needs of the customers, development of individual work plans, group counseling, individual counseling and career planning, and short-term vocational services, including communication and interviewing skills, punctuality, and work conduct.

Training services. Access to training services is not open to all. Rather, it is limited to adults and dislocated workers who, in the judgement of one-stop operators, are in need of more in-depth services (more so than those offered as part of the "intensive services" of the One-Stop Center). However, in the event that the resources to establish an adult employment and training program are limited, the local Workforce Investment Board must request that one-stop operators give priority attention to public assistance participants and to those who are deemed to be of low-income.

Persons who qualify for training services are asked to select a program that is linked directly to job opportunities available in the local workforce investment area. They can, however, opt to take part in training that qualifies them for jobs located in other areas. But, they must be willing to relocate to those jobs upon completion of their training program. The various training programs that are available for persons who qualify for these services include:

- Occupational skills training, including training for nontraditional employment.
- On-the-job training.
- Programs combining workplace training with related instruction (such as cooperative education).
- Private sector training programs.
- Skills upgrading and retraining.
- Entrepreneurial training.
- Job readiness training.
- Adult education and literacy activities carried out in combination with other training activities listed above.
- Customized training developed in concert with employers.

Individual Training Accounts: A central component of the WIA system. There is an important process that is involved in the establishment of training services in the local workforce investment area. First, the one-stop system operator is charged with the responsibility of developing a list of eligible training providers and profiling information on past performance and costs for their training services. Once completed, the qualified adult is offered the opportunity to select an eligible provider of training services. Next, the user is provided an *Individual Training Account* (ITA) that facilitates the purchase of a training program that best meets his or her needs or interests. The training services selected by that individual must involve training for occupations that are in demand locally, help qualify the individual for jobs that exist in another area if

the worker is willing to relocate to that area after training, or prepare the customer for occupations that the local board believes has high potential in the local area. It is important to note that the WIA legislation does allow reciprocal relationships to be developed with other states so that one-stop providers are permitted to accept ITAs funded by these states.

WIA and the Possible Roles for the South's Land-Grant Universities

As Southern states begin to gear-up for the WIA system, including the appointment of the state Workforce Investment Board members, and the implementation of local workforce investment efforts, it is important that their leaders (both at the state and local levels) be cognizant of the significant capabilities that reside within their land-grant university system. No doubt, land-grant schools are less inclined to be directly engaged in customized workforce training, as is the case among community colleges and technical institutions. But, to assume that land-grant universities have little to offer of relevance to the WIA effort would be nothing short of a major oversight. The following is a sampling of the capabilities that the South's land-grant institutions can offer, through its research and extension education programs, that have relevance to the workforce investment system outlined in the WIA legislation.

Labor market information and assessments. A major responsibility of local Workforce Investment Boards is to fashion training opportunities for local citizens that respond to the workforce needs of local employers. In many instances, securing the data to guide these activities is difficult. Land-grant university social sciences researchers are well positioned to assess local labor markets, including the identification of the level of job skills and educational credentials needed to qualify for these job vacancies. And with its access to state, regional, and national data, these individuals can keep the state Workforce Investment Board, and its attached local boards, aware of macro-level shifts that are likely to have an impact on various industrial and occupational groupings in the state and localities.

Local Workforce Investment Board training: Extension has a history of providing training to community-based boards that are intended to help these groups function more effectively. With regard to the local Workforce Investment Boards, the Extension Service can offer training on tools/strategies for keeping meetings on track, how to carry out strategic planning and visioning, and the step by step procedures for moving from ideas to action.

One-Stop Centers. Given the depth and breadth of its outreach educational programs in the areas of family and consumer education, community development, agriculture and natural resources, and 4-H youth development, a land-grant university's Extension Service can serve as a major partner in supporting the activities of the One-Stop Center situated within each of the local workforce investment areas. County Extension agents are physically located in nearly every county in the South. As such, they offer access to a comprehensive outreach educational program through their links to the land-grant universities within their state. Among the capabilities that Extension brings to the table include:

- Providing *core services,* such as designing and administering asset mapping questionnaires that help uncover the wealth of talents/skills of users of One-Stop Centers, as well as conducting an analysis and interpretation of labor market trends at the local, state, regional, and national levels.

- Offering *intensive services* related to job interviewing/readiness skills, enhancement of employability skills (such as time

management and punctuality, communication and team-building skills), and adult literacy programs.

- Engaging in ***training services***, such as child care provider training, how to start home-based and micro business operations, exploring entrepreneurial opportunities, and certification programs that provide customers with the essential foundation to be employed in agriculture-related fields, such as food handlers and pesticide applicators.

Dislocated and at-risk populations. In the event that state resources are not sufficient to address the full compliment of workforce training needs of the state's residents, local workforce boards are required to direct its resources to at-risk populations, particularly low-income and public assistance recipients. Extension programs in the South have a strong record of involvement in the delivery of educational programs and strategies to meet the needs of at-risk adults, youth, and families.

Youth Councils. The Extension Service serves as the major youth development outreach education program of the land-grant universities. Many states' 4-H Youth Development Programs are engaged in a workforce preparedness system that begins at a child's earliest phase of education and continuing through the employment of that individual. The intent is to train adults, teachers, other educators, and volunteers to better prepare youth for the world of work. These activities often include career exploration, mentorship and internship opportunities. In addition, the very success of 4-H youth development programming is directly linked to its ability to involve families, schools and communities in working in collaboration to support the needs of local youth. This 4-H networking experience can be a valuable resource for local youth councils.

Youth leadership development. With its long history of involvement in leadership development programs, the Extension Service has the capacity to provide a diversity of leadership training opportunities for youth. Not only are such programs designed to improve the organizational leadership skills of young people, they also provide them with the confidence and skills to be active players in giving shape to current and future direction of their communities.

Performance accountability. Given the significant accountability responsibilities being given to local Workforce Investment Boards, it is critical that measurable outcomes associated with their local workforce-related efforts be undertaken. The Extension Service has a excellent cadre of state specialists who are highly trained in program evaluation and take an active role in assessing the impact of Extension educational programs in the state. This capability could be made available to local Workforce Investment Boards to help design a rigorous and sound accountability system that address the unique needs of the target audiences of the WIA legislation.

Economic development possibilities. An important role for the one-stop provider is to offer training opportunities that are reflective of the needs of employers located within the local workforce investment area. In some cases, however, the pool of available job slots will be limited. This is very likely to be the case in smaller-sized rural communities. If this proves to the be the case, local Workforce Investment Boards will need to be active players in helping promote job expansion in their local area. To be successful, these boards will have to be knowledgeable of the various economic development strategies that best fit the conditions and resources of their local area. Land-grant university researchers and extension faculty are well-versed on the type of economic development strategies that hold the greatest promise of being successful in various communities.

For more information

See the web sites below for additional information about the Workforce Investment Act of 1998.

U.S. Department of Labor
Official Workforce Investment Act site
http://usworkforce.org/

usworkforce.org
Gateway to Information on the Workforce Investment Act

Workforce Investment Act Overview
Slide presentation (45 slides)
http://usworkforce.org/wiaslides/index.html#1

Workforce ATM (Interstate Conference of Employment Security Agencies)
http://www.icesa.org/

Workforce Development, National Governor's Association
http://nga.org/CBP/Activities/WorkforceDev.asp

WIA One-Stop Partners
http://nga.org/Workforce/WIAOneStopPartners.htm

John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development
http://heldrich.rutgers.edu

National Alliance of Business
http://www.nab.com/workforcedevelopment/workforceinvestmentact/introduction/index.cfm

National Association of State Workforce Board Chairs
http://www.subnet.nga.org/workforcecouncilchairs/index.htm

Workforce Preparation Page
http://www.reeusda.gov/wfp

National Youth Employment Coalition
http://www.nyec.org

Conclusion

There is no doubt that states and local areas will be have to devote considerable time and energy to making operational the various elements associated with the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. However, the excitement associated with this legislation is that local areas will have a major voice in giving shape to how the WIA plays out in their localities. No doubt, the success of this landmark legislation will be dependent, in no small way, on the active involvement and commitment of people at the total community—business leaders, government officials, organizations and citizens representing all segments of the community. Southern Land-grant universities, with their long tradition of investments in applied research and outreach education programs that meet the needs of their citizens, represent important resources that can contribute to the valuable work of the state and local Workforce Investment Boards.

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